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A Conversational Analysis of Habakkuk

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by

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Abstract

Alter has noted the emphasis of direct speech for narratives and B. M. Rocine has offered a discourse analysis model which prioritizes embedded speech within narratives for micro analysis. How can embedded and direct speech be incorporated into macroanalysis? Conversational analysis may provide an intriguing solution. By integrating certain elements of linguistics conversational analysis may offer a way to discern larger structures in monologue and dialogue laden genres. The prophecy of Habakkuk is a continuous dialogue between the prophet and God and is of manageable size making it an ideal initial case study. This paper will seek to analyze the book of Habakkuk through the four interactional organization strategies described by Paul ten Have. After the analysis has been completed quantitative and qualitative findings will be detailed as well as an assessment of its usefulness in later studies.

Presentation Introduction

Good morning, everyone. I would like to thank you for choosing to attend my presentation. I assume everyone here agrees that choice implies meaning, and your choice to attend this session, instead of one of the others, encourages me to dream that perhaps my topic is of some interest to the outside world. My name is Don McIntyre, but all my friends call me Mac. I must confess, I feel humbled to be invited to present today. I only sent in an abstract after some prodding by an old professor, which I originally refused because I knew that I would be surrounded by "real linguists," which I am not. When I saw the names of presenters, my fears were realized, and I was confident that I would be the dumbest person in this room. Even if that is true, first-class conditional, I pray that my topic provides you with some measure of interest, edification, and encouragement. Let us begin.

Introduction

Over the past few decades applications of linguistic methods to biblical texts have proliferated with varying results but a general consensus of the field's benefit for Biblical studies has been reached.[2] Discourse analytical methods have proven problematic for biblical genres outside of narrative, especially in discovering the meta-structure of Old Testament poetic and prophetic texts.[3] With the rapid growth of discourse analytical applications to the Biblical texts, a number of linguistic methods have been introduced to Biblical studies.[4] The question still looms which of these linguistic methods, or the schools which birthed them, will prove most useful for exegetical endeavors.[5] This study will seek to examine the tenability of one particular specialized method, conversational analysis, for Biblical studies with particular attention given to its suitability for determining structure.

The book of Habakkuk is univocally accepted as a conversation between two individuals with little to no narrative material.[6] As such, it serves as a useful transcript for a conversational

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[2] See Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green, *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

[3] Christian Locatell, "Translation and Exegeting Hebrew Poetry: Illustrated with Psalm 70," *Journal of Translation*, 11, no 1 (2015): 35, noted this problem in Hebrew poetry when he stated that "the unique challenges of BH poetry call for a holistic approach that marshals insights from the extra-linguistic setting, co-text, and multifaceted discourse features." The nature of this difficulty for prophecy is to be expected given close relationship between poetry and prophecy noted by Lynell Zogbo and Ernst R. Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible: A Guide for Understanding and for Translating*, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 73.

[4] See general discussion in Benjamin J. Noonan, *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 151–68 for a description of the most popular discourse analytical methods within Old Testament studies. For a discussion on the relationship between conversational analysis, linguistics, and syntax which provides derivative warrant for this study, see Emmanuel A. Schegloff. "The Relevance of Repair to Syntax-for-Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics 12: Discourse and Syntax*, ed. Talmy Givon (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 261–88.

[5] Noonan, *Advances*, 178–79.

[6] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 136, who is representative of major commentators, notes dialogue form of chapter 1 is unique compared to other genre forms in this book and others but recognizes that Hab 2 forms the Lord's response to the prophet (and therefore is also part of a dialogue; 165) and later describes the hymn of chapter 3, stating that, Habakkuk "now offers his prayer to that temple with the

analysis. Furthermore, the length of Habakkuk makes it amenable to an introductory analysis to assess the tangibility of conversational analysis in future studies. If a conversational analysis of Habakkuk can yield a discourse structure that is 1.) feasible, 2.) productive, and 3.) novel, this method will warrant further explorations by biblical scholars. If it fails to meet these criteria, its usefulness can be doubted. This study will conclude that conversational analysis does have the ability to yield a three-part meta-structure for Habakkuk which is feasible, productive and novel through an application of Paul ten Have's conversational analysis method and Véronique Traverso's conversational analysis of complaints.[7]

Orientation to Method

Conversational analysis was developed in the 1960s at the University of California at Berkley by graduate students Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff. Eventually, Sacks moved on to become "a Fellow at the Center for the Scientific Study of Suicide in Los Angeles" and began analyzing tape recording to the suicide prevention center where he developed the approach which would become conversational analysis.[8] Conversational analysis is "the study of the orders of talk-in-interaction, whatever its character or setting."[9] Conversational analysis' analytic goal is to recognize "'patterns of interaction' or 'sequential structures'. The basic interest, however, is in 'the social organisation [*sic*] underlying the production and intelligibility of

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expectation that the Lord will hear and answer" (214) again showing the dialogue's continuation. Though the dialogue, or conversation, may take many forms, it is still dialogue. If a person chooses to sing or read to another, they are still conversing.

[7] Paul ten Have, *Doing Conversational Analysis: A Practical Guide*, 2nd (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007); Véronique Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints in Conversation between Friends," in *Journal of Pragmatics* 41 (2009), 2385–99.

[8] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 5–7.

[9] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis,* 4.

ordinary, everyday social actions and activities."[10] It is this patterning and sequencing of everyday social interactions and activities which is most amenable to the exegetical task. If the Bible reflects historical realities by historical individuals employing literary methods of the day, then the transcriptions of these events could yield a structure which is best observed by conversational analysis.

Paul ten Have

The late Paul ten Have was formerly an Associate Professor in Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam who published an introductory book on conversational analysis.[11] Conversational analysis typically requires the observation and accurate transcription of conversations before an analysis can be conducted, which ten Have describes in the chapters five and six of his work.[12] While these earlier chapters may stimulate dialogue for some critics less convinced of the faithful transmission of the text, this study will proceed on the evangelical presupposition that "any treatments of the text of quest for sources lying behind the text that leads to . . . rejecting its claims to authorship" are illegitimate and incompatible with the doctrine of inerrancy. [13] As such the analysis will treat the book of Habakkuk as an inerrant witness to, and an accurate transcription of, the conversation which occurred between Habakkuk and the LORD God as reported in Habakkuk 1:1.

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[10] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 120.

[11] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis,* back cover.

[12] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 67-114.

[13] "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," The Evangelical Theological Society, specifically "Article XVIII: Denial," accessed March 16, 2023, https://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf.

Paul ten Have notes three distinct elements which must be present in and empirical account of utterances:

> 1 'formulation of what action or actions are being accomplished';
> 2 'a grounding of this formulation in the "reality" of the participants';
> 3 an explication of how a particular practice, i.e. an utterance or conduct, can yield a particular, recognizable action.[14]

He then qualifies these elements stating that:

> Requirement (1) has to be extensively exemplified with data displays and analyses. Requirement (2) involves the demonstration that the participants in the data have indeed understood the utterance as doing that kind of action, most often by inspecting subsequent talk. Requirement (3) indicates that such demonstrations of particular understandings are not, in themselves, sufficient. One should 'provide analytically the grounds for the possibility of such an understanding'. . . whether that was actually discernible in subsequent utterances or not.[15]

Many contemporary exegetes have noted the basic utterance of the poetic genre as parallelism.[16] There has also been frequent recourse to parallelism in prophetic exegesis.[17] Agreeing with James Kugel and Robert Alter's idea of "furthering" within cola structures, an "utterance" will be considered either the bi-cola or tri-cola, unless a line of poetry is deemed a mono-colon.[18]

ten Have notes four steps to conversational analysis after a recording and transcription have been obtained. These steps are turn taking organization, sequence organization, repair

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[14] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis,* 121.

[15] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis,* 121.

[16] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 30; James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1–3; Samuel T. S. Goh, *The Basics of Hebrew Poetry: Theory and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 45–47.

[17] Francisco Javier del Barco-del Barco, "Syntactic Structures of Parallelism: A Case Study in Biblical Prophecy," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 29, no. 1 (2003): 37–53.

[18] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 30; Kugel, *The Basics of Hebrew Poetry*, 1–3; for discussion on identification and role of monocolon, see Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 170.

organization and turn design organization.[19] These four steps will be defined in the appropriate

section and serve as a guide to the conversational analysis below.

Traverso

Traverso has written extensively on complaint phenomena from a conversational

analytical perspective.[20] Traverso admits dependence on others who have described the

relationship between long sequences and complaints through the use of story telling [*sic]* or

troubles-telling/confiding which are "two different ways of coping with the issue of long

sequences."[21] Habakkuk would be considered a long sequence, composed of far more lines than

the ideal two line complaint structure with a complaint/apology or a complaint/affiliation

adjacency pair expectation.[22] Storytelling is seemingly absent from Habakkuk, who is instead

reliant upon trouble-telling or confiding as the primary form of complaint. Traverso notes Gail

Jefferson's six elements of a trouble-telling sequence candidate: "Approach, Arrival, Delivery,

Work-up, Close Implicature, Exit" and offers his own structure for confiding which has four

phases: "(1) initiation, (2) core part, (3) complaint development, (4) closing."[23] Identifying

Habakkuk's complaint approach and assessing the books correlation to the appropriate structure

may yield the book's meta-structure. After the form of complaint sequence is found, the

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[19] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 128-39.

[20] See Margutti Piera, Véronique Traverso, Pugliese Rosa, "I'm Sorry 'about That': Apologies, Indexicals, and (Unnamed) Offenses," *Discourse Processes* 53 (2016): 63–82: 1–2; Trine Heinemann and Véronique Traverso, "Complaining in Interaction," *Journal of Pragmatics* 41, (2009): 2381–84; Véronique Traverso, "Les objections et leur traitement dans des petits commerces français et syriens," (lecture delivered at the University of Montpellier, Montpellier, France, July 2009), 99; and Véronique Traverso, "Cristallisation des désaccords et mise en place de négociations dans l'interaction: des variations situationnelles," in *Des négociations au travail*, ed. M. Grosjean and L. Mondada (Lyon: University Press of Lyon, 2005), 43–69.

[21] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2387.

[22] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2388.

[23] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2388.

complaint structure which Traverso has identified includes an initiation, a core part, complaint

development, and a closing.[24]

Conversational Analysis of Habakkuk

The following will present a rudimentary conversational analysis of Habakkuk employing

Paul ten Have's four-step method, supplemented by the work of Véronique Traverso's work on

complaint structure. Time and space constraints preclude a satisfactory explanation of the

sequence organization found within the text of Habakkuk, so only two adjacency pairs will be

described in this study.[25]

Turn Taking Organization

Turn taking organization is based on the idea that within conversations, only one person

speaks at a time, and there is minimal gapping or overlapping between participants engaged in

conversation.[26] The turns can be self-selected or other selected, depending on who initiates the

conversation and how.[27] For example, in a telephone call, the caller initiates a conversation

(other selected) even though the speaking begins with the person answering the phone. In

Habakkuk, it is interesting that Habakkuk always self-selects to initiate conversation. At no point

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[24] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2388.

[25] An in-depth conversational analysis with attention to the full sequence organization is currently being written by the author and is contracted with GlossaHouse under the title *The Conversational Analysis Commentary Series on the Old Testament: Habakkuk*, forthcoming. This will be the first book in a series of conversational analysis commentaries. Any qualified individuals (ABD or earned terminal research degree in biblical studies or linguistics from an accredited institution) interested in contributing to the series are encouraged to email Mac at the email listed above with subject line "CA Contributor Proposal."

[26] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 128.

[27] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis,* 128-29.

in Habakkuk does God ask him to continue the dialogue through posing a question (though he does command him to perform certain activities, i.e., "look," "write").

Turn 1

Habakkuk 1:1 is not part of the conversation, and therefore difficult to place. Disagreement whether Habakkuk received an oracle prior to verse 2, or whether it is a latter introduction appended after receipt of the oracle are speculative and unnecessary. If an oracle was received which prompted 1:2ff, then the initial turn was selected by יהוה through non-verbal (משא, חזה) means and outside of the bounds of the transcript; if the oracle begins in 1:5ff, and 1:1 was a later addendum to introduce the oracle, then the initial utterance of the conversation was the result of Habakkuk's self-selection expressed in his lament's invocation.[28] Given the content of the lament revolving around God's failure to respond to Habakkuk, it seems more likely that Habakkuk self-selected. Habakkuk's turn spans from vv. 2-4. There is no gap apparent, nor is there any overlap apparent. The absence of overlap may be due to the nature of the transcription, but Habakkuk's turn ends with a complete thought and therefore an overlap should not be entertained.

Yahweh's turn begins in v. 5 and continues through the end of verse 11. Though the LORD is free and able to respond or not too according to His sovereign prerogative, he was effectively summoned via invocation in 1:2 and therefore is considered "other selected" which is

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[28] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 128; Habakkuk's self-selection seems warranted by Habakkuk's use of חזה as noted by Richard D Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), loc. 2836, who states that, "Habakkuk's stress seems to be on his own participation in the revelatory process." This correlates well to the observations of Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, New American Commentary 20 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), , 289, which describe the prophets role in initiating the receipt of an oracle by posing a question such as found in Habakkuk's opening invocation (1:2).

the highest level on the conversational turn hierarchy.[29] When יהוה ends his turn in verse 11 there is no indication that He is interested in furthering the conversation with Habakkuk. There are no gaps reported or any overlap between this turn and the next. This ends the first complete turn.

Turn 2

The second turn begins in 1:12 with Habakkuk's self-selection to continue the conversation by asking a series of clarifying questions followed by several assertions through 1:17. The prophet ends his turn by describing an action concomitant with his speech and expressing his purpose for the action, to await his answer from יהוה. The text of 2:1 is difficult to analyze. There is no overlap in conversation between Habakkuk's speech from 1:12-2:1, but there is ambiguity on whether a gap exists.[30] Is Habakkuk literally standing on a guard post waiting for the LORD's reply, or is this a metaphor? Was Habakkuk already stationed at the guard post, or did he move there? Any answers would be speculative and ultimately unhelpful. It is best to accept the text as it has been written reflecting no gap of import since a temporal deictic marker is lacking and the text employs the ו consecutive in 2:2.

The LORD's turn is again "other selected" as Habakkuk has challenged him through a legal disputation and a symbolic action meant to draw the LORD's attention.[31] The LORD is now described by the author, outside of the conversation, as replying to Habakkuk. The LORD's

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[29] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 128.

[30] This ambiguity is seen by the pragmatic range of the expressions to "take a stand" or "look out to see," which both describe postures that Habakkuk will assume until an answer is received. This state could last for a prolonged or shortened amount of time. The use of the conjunctive ו grammatically implies a close continuation, either negating or minimizing the gap implied by these stative metaphors. If there is a gap, it should be accepted as negligible. However, the audacity of Habakkuk, noted well by Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 165, would seem to warrant a prompt refutation by the LORD.

[31] Kevin J Cathcart, "'Law Is Paralysed' (Habakkuk 1:4): Habakkuk's Dialogue with God and the Language of Legal Disputation," in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 345.

turn begins with a series of imperatives, followed by a purpose statement in 2:2. The LORD's

turn ends in 2:20 with יהוה speaking in the third person concerning himself, showing himself as

being in His holy temple and commanding the earth to be silent. As with the previous turn, there

is no overlap and the potential for ambiguity for a gap. Lacking a temporal marker, it is safest to

assume no gap in the conversation between יהוה and Habakkuk at this point.

Turn 3

The third turn concludes the conversation with Habakkuk self-selecting to speak again.

The LORD had required Habakkuk to write the oracle given to him in 2:2-20 but had

commanded the entire earth to be silent rendering Habakkuk's turn peculiar. The chapter begins

with an editorial notation concerning the speech of the prophet describing it as a prayer and

continues through 3:19 at which point the conversation terminates. In this conversation,

Habakkuk, who initiated the conversation, has the final word, though it is now marked by

deference.

Evaluation

An analysis of the turn-taking organization within Habakkuk shows that its employment

is entirely feasible– which is why most commentators have organized their commentaries around

the conversational turns of the book.[32] As such, this part of the analysis is rather mundane. The

novelty and productivity of this analytical method is found in the subtle nuance of how the turns

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[32] Ralph L Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary 32 (Dallas: Word, 1984), 94–96; J. M. Powis Smith, William Hayes Ward, and Julius August Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1911), 7; Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 287; Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 27–28; etc.

are initiated and terminated. In all three of Habakkuk's turns, the prophet self-selects. In both of

Yahweh's turns, the LORD is "other selected" to participate. This is interesting in two regards.

First, the prophet's initial complaint is that the LORD is not hearing him, accusing the LORD of

being a poor conversation partner.[33] Ironically, the LORD responds immediately to the prophet's

cry in the text. The second intriguing element is that both times the LORD speaks, he speaks

emphatically in a way which does not invite a continued conversation, and yet Habakkuk

continues to converse, seemingly unwelcomed. Since the LORD attempts to terminate the

conversation, by not selecting Habakkuk to respond, it seems that the original meta-structure of

the three stanzas, based on Habakkuk's statement of problems noted above, is justified when

each stanza begins with Habakkuk's self-selection to speak (initiation). This was an unexpected

result which implies that conversational analysis may be profitable for future studies in

delineating structural breaks. The meta-structure from turn analysis is found in Figure 1.

Macro-Structure of Habakkuk Through Turns								
Macro-Structure Divisions	Title 1:1	Turn 1 1:2-11		Turn 2 1:12-2:20		Sub-Title 3:1	Turn 3 3:2-18	Colophon 3:19
Speaker	Author/ Redactor	Habakkuk 1:2-5	God 1:6-11	Habakkuk 1:12-2:1	God 2:2-20	Author/ Redactor	Habakkuk	Author/ Redactor

Figure 1

Sequence Organization

Sequence organization is based on the notion that conversations are sequentially

organized because one thing leads to another.[34] This means that an utterance has an intended

effect on the interlocutor to progress the conversations, and that effect can be understood by the

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[33] Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 96.

[34] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 130.

type of utterance the speaker has made.[35] Sequence organization in conversational analysis is usually assessed by the relationship of adjacency pairs found within the discourse.[36] Junita Siahaan described adjacency pairs as corresponding utterances which are considered automated sequences between conversational participants whereby the latter speaker responds appropriately to the previous utterance made by the earlier speaker.[37] A sequence organization for the first turn of Habakkuk would render something similar to the Figure 2. It is intriguing that God does not respond in any of the expected ways to Habakkuk's utterances. Though there is much worthy of exploration, there are two primary adjacency pairs in this turn which are critical to understanding the book of Habakkuk. The first is that of greeting/greeting, and the second would be that of complaint/apology.[38]

Habakkuk 1:2 initiates the conversation with the first utterance, a bi-colon with the vocative "Oh LORD" and the question, "How long. . . ?" The vocative serves as a greeting by grammatical form.[39] As such, it expects a greeting in reply by the addressee.[40] When God replies to Habakkuk, accepting the invitation to converse, יהוה fails to give Habakkuk a proper greeting (1:5). This is considered impolite.[41] This lack of politeness in conversation between God and Habakkuk seems intentional through an examination of the rest of the first complete turn.

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[35] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 130.

[36] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 130.

[37] Junita Siahaan, "An Analysis of Adjacency Pairs in the Conversation between David Frost and Paul McCartney," *UICELL Conference Proceedings 2018* 2 (2019): 111, https://doi.org/https://journal.uhamka.ac.id/index.php/uicell/article/view/2301.

[38] Siahaan, "An Analysis of Adjacency Pairs," 112.

[39] Christo Van der Merwe et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 249; Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 694.

[40] Siahaan, "An Analysis of Adjacency Pairs," 112.

[41] Ratna Padmi Trihartanti and Seldie Julyana Septian, "The Role of Adjacency Pairs to Create Politeness Strategies in Students' Phatic Utterances," *Register Journal* 14, no. 2 (2021): 243–62, https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v14i2.243-262, who note that the use of adjacency pairs in "Turn taking also shows that

The second aspect of Habakkuk's first utterance was designated as an interrogative; however, the phrase "How long Oh Lord" is familiar lament language, and may be considered idiomatic, and therefore the interrogative is better understood as a complaint.[42] Since the complaint concerns the recipient, and not a third party, the complaint expects an apology, which Habakkuk never receives.[43]

Analysis of Turn 1		
Habakkuk	**Expected Reply**	**God**
Greeting	Greeting	-None-
Question	Answer	Request (Implied Answer)
Complaint	Apology	Assessment
Question	Answer	Warning
Complaint	Apology	Threat
Assessment	Agreement	Warning
Assessment	Agreement	Warning
		Threat
		Assessment
		Assessment
		Assessment
		Answer

Figure 2

Again, יהוה seems to be an impolite conversational partner towards Habakkuk, and the exegete must ask why this is so. However, repair organization concerning complaint conversations seems to explain these improprieties with an appropriately orthodox answer.

Repair Organization

Communication is difficult. Communication assumes a shared stock of concepts among communicative participants, such as language, background, etc.[44] If these shared concepts do not

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participant maintains not only social interaction but also politeness" (248). By the LORD not finishing the adjacency pair of greeting, he has been impolite.

[42] David J. Clark and Howard A. Hatton, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Habakkuk*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 69.

[43] Siahaan, "An Analysis of Adjacency Pairs," 112.

[44] See Makoto Hayashi, Geoffrey Raymond, and Jack Sidnell, "Conversational Repair and Human Understanding: An Introduction," in *Conversational Repair and Human Understanding*, ed. Makoto Hayashi, Geoffrey Raymond, and Jack Sidnell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8–9, who note that such background information is "taken-for-granted assumptions of social life—i.e., that one's interlocutor will draw on background knowledge of 'what everyone knows' and supply whatever unstated understandings may be required in order to make sense of what one says. . . . [W]e can further notice that breaching these assumptions has a deep moral significance for these participants."

exist, there will be a chance of misunderstanding.[45] Even when a conceptual world is shared

among participants, misunderstandings can be proliferated due to internal factors of the speaker

or hearer (distraction, lack of recall of information, slips of the tongue, etc.) or external factors

like excessive noise or a drop in phone service.[46] People communicate intentionally to

understand and to be understood, if a participant recognizes a misunderstanding, they will

typically seek to gain a proper understanding through a variety of means, this search for

understanding through corrective actions are examples of conversational repair.[47] Repair

organization seeks to identify the repairable (the utterance which is misunderstood), the trouble

source (why the utterance did not have its intended effect), and the initiator of the repair

sequence (self-repair by speaker of the repairable, or other initiated repair by the listener).[48]

In conversation, a complaint is uttered to initiate a discussion about a negative event.[49] As

part of a complaint adjacency pair, it expects agreement, remedy, account, or an excuse.[50] When

a complaint fails to achieve this expected response from the plaintiff's audience by receiving

potential or actual rejection, the plaintiff will typically engage in repair operations to make up for

their perceived conversational inadequacy.[51] This may be done through an extreme case

formulation whereby the plaintiff expresses "things in egregious terms" and "figurative

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[45] Hayashi, Raymond, and Sidnell, "Conversational Repair and Human Understanding," 8–9.

[46] Hayashi, Raymond, and Sidnell, "Conversational Repair and Human Understanding," 3, who note that troubles arise as a result of "troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding" and that conversational participants seek to manage these troubles by repair as they occur.

[47] Hayashi, Raymond, and Sidnell, "Conversational Repair and Human Understanding," 3.

[48] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 133.

[49] Douglas W. Maynard, "Defensive Mechanisms: I-Mean-Prefaced Utterances in Complaint and Other Conversational Sequences," in Hayashi, Raymond, and Sidnell, *Conversational Repair and Human Understanding*, 201.

[50] Maynard, "Defensive Mechanisms," 201.

[51] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2393.

expressions that are somewhat invulnerable to critique" which will be exemplified by Habakkuk below.[52]

Turn 1 (1:2-11)

The first turn includes two short speeches: a complaint by Habakkuk and an oracle from יהוה. It is interesting to note that Habakkuk desires to engage God in conversation, but God attempts to terminate the conversation with a series of declarations. Turn one includes Habakkuk's initiation of a complaint, and God's negotiation, showing that the LORD finds Habakkuk's complaint unreasonable.

Complaint Initiation (1:2-4)

Habakkuk initiates the conversation (through the vocative idiomatic "How long Oh LORD) and lodges a complaint against יהוה, his interlocutor. Habakkuk's complaints are the desired subject of the conversation by the initiator; in short, Habakkuk wants to know why God has not responded to Habakkuk's prayers concerning injustice.[53] To make these complaints, Habakkuk employs the idiomatic phrase "How long Oh LORD?" and then lists his complaints in three bi-colon lines. The first two lines have a question and an assertion, the last line has two assessments. These complaints are an instance of trouble telling.[54] It is interesting that Habakkuk

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[52] Maynard, "Defensive Mechanisms," 203.

[53] Kenneth J. Turner, *Habakkuk: The Judge of All the Earth Shall Do Right*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 47 who notes of Habakkuk, "his immediate focus is on a God who pays no attention to the cries . . . nor to the one who cries . . . Habakkuk's main concern is with God, not the evil around him."

[54] See Ilaria Riccioni et al., "Linguistic Features and Pragmatic Functions of Direct Reported Speech in Italian Troubles Telling Sequences," *Language & Communication* 90 (2023): 63–81, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2023.03.001, 78, who note that "in general, when we disclose our troubles to others we do so by constructing a narrative to frame how and when the problem arose and who or what its source is, in the case of romantic problems this narrative constructing seems to be particularly evident." Habakkuk clearly

begins his complaint with the standardized lament form but renders an incomplete lament missing an assurance of being heard, the requisite turn to faith, and corresponding vow of praise.[55] This will prove pivotal throughout the rest of the conversation.

Devine Negotiation (1:5-11)

God fails to greet Habakkuk when he responds. God also refuses to apologize for his alleged transgressions against the prophet or align Himself with the prophet's emotional state. This initial failure of an interlocutor to align with the plaintiff's emotional distress is common in complaint conversations.[56] However, both of these actions are considered impolite, and both need explained.

It is not infrequent for God to greet his prophets in conversation, such as the familiar "Son of Man" in Ezekiel.[57] Why would God fail to greet Habakkuk back? The second conversational line (1:5b) may hold an answer. Habakkuk's lament form lacked the expected expression of belief which was standard in the lament. יהוה's response to look, wonder, and be astounded because Habakkuk would not believe even if told seems not only ironic, but may be an intentional rebuke.[58] Though Habakkuk is concerned with God's distance and lack of action, the LORD informs the prophet that He is acting, and the LORD desires to lodge a complaint

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notes the problem of injustice and violence, with God as its source, and that the problem has persisted for a long time in this section.

[55] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlant: John Knox, 1981), 170. For a discussion on qinah structures and their employment in prophetic literature, see William H Shea, "The Qinah Structure of the Book of Lamentations," *Biblica* 60, no. 1 (1979): 103–7.

[56] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2392.

[57] Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary 17 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 74, notes that, "God uses the designation 'son of man' ninety-three times in the book to address the prophet, while he never calls him by his proper name."

[58] See Turner, *Habakkuk*, 67, who notes that "The tone is remorseless—no answers, just more reason to question."

about the prophet's lack of faith. Regarding the LORD's supposed distance from Habakkuk and the reality of injustice, the LORD informs Habakkuk that the injustice which the prophet sees is only the beginning. More injustice is to come for the prophet and the people of Israel, and God Himself is the one responsible for it. The LORD ends his turn with a description of the impending exile of Israel by Babylon. By responding in this way יהוה has topically aligned with Habakkuk's complaint but has not followed up by aligning Himself with the prophet challenging the "complainability" of the topic.[59] This leads Habakkuk to negotiate with God to defend the topic as a complainable matter, seeking to convince God to align Himself with Habakkuk in the second full turn.

Turn 2 (1:12-2:20)

The first turn introduced a complainable topic by Habakkuk. The LORD was unmoved by the complaint and refused to align himself with Habakkuk. In the second turn, Habakkuk seeks to further the conversation and attain the sympathies of the LORD in the matters of injustice which Habakkuk has raised. The second turn presents important conversational phenomenon which are critical to understanding the book's message such as extreme case formulation, negotiation, and repair formulations.

Prophetic Complaint Development (1:12-2:1)

When a speaker's complaint is challenged or dismissed as an uncomplainable matter by the recipient, the plaintiff will typically be prompted "to justify the complaint once more."[60]

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[59] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2993.

[60] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2993.

Habakkuk does this by presenting an extreme case formulation. An extreme case formulation was described as the presentation of some action in egregious terms by Maynard.[61] Pomerantz has described extreme case formulation as occurring in three particular methods, which include asserting things in the strongest case anticipating non-sympathetic hearings, proposing cause, or to assert the rightness/wrongness of an action.[62]

The second turn of Habakkuk's oracle demonstrates an extreme case formulation through asserting God's eternality and holiness (strongest case, c.f. 1:12) while juxtaposing the wrongness of the LORD's course of action, since Habakkuk's understanding of God's holiness cannot allow God to permit the wicked to do such evil on those more righteous than they are (1:13). Habakkuk presents his extreme case by appealing to shared, presumably covenantal, information between himself and the LORD.[63] Extreme case formulation should be expected at this point in the conversation as part of the negotiation. Traverso notes that, "Negotiations for the introduction of the complaint are the most frequent case. They do not always lead to the completion of the complaint core part" which requires affiliation of the audience with the complaint of the plaintiff.[64] During negotiation conversational participants seek to sustain the complaint activity despite resistance.[65] Habakkuk makes his appeal in hopes that his rhetoric can convince the LORD of the wrongness of his course of actions when understood against the LORD's nature, but is ultimately unsuccessful in persuading God to align with Habakkuk's

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[61] Maynard, "Defensive Mechanisms," 203.

[62] Anita Pomerantz, "Extreme Case Formulations: A Way of Legitimizing Claims," *Human Studies*, 9, nos. 2–3 (1986): 227.

[63] Mario Manuel Catalino Melendez, *Covenant Evocations in Habakkuk: An Exploration in Intertextuality*, (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2021), 138–98.

[64] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2993.

[65] Traverso, "The Dilemma of Third-Party Complaints," 2993.

complaint. This failure of persuasion is seen in יהוה's final turn, though the LORD does make an important concession through repairing a critical misunderstanding on Habakkuk's part.

Divine Repair (2:2-6a)

The LORD opens his second turn with a prophetic commission by which Habakkuk is commanded to write of the impending judgement, signaling finality for the LORD's decree. However, after the commission found in 2:2-3, יהוה engages in conversational repair in 2:4-5. Conversational repair is "the action or actions by which speakers and recipients work to address . . . 'problems in speaking, hearing and understanding.'"[66] The repairable is found in Habakkuk's misunderstanding of God's use of an unrighteous nation to judge a nation which is more righteous (1:13), and perhaps in the coming judgement of God's covenant people (1:12). This is an example of other-initiated repair, which is necessary since Habakkuk failed to believe the LORD's announcement of judgement, thoroughly in line with the LORD's statement in Hab. 1:5b.[67] In 2:4 יהוה makes a concession to repair Habakkuk's misunderstanding in 1:12 by stating that those who believe will live. This is ironic due to Habakkuk's demonstrated failure to believe evinced in his opening complaint's lack of the expected turn to faith and his stated rebuttal to God's pronouncement found in 1:12. By stating this concession, the LORD shows his covenantal faithfulness to those who show themselves covenant keepers, but the covenant enforcer for those who fail to maintain the covenant by faith.[68] The LORD then continues his negotiation with Habakkuk, failing to align with the prophet's complaint, by showing Habakkuk why his complaint in the second turn is ultimately unjustified.

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[66] Rebecca Clift, *Conversation Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 232.

[67] For a description of other-initiated repair, see Clift, *Conversational Analysis*, 247–58.

[68] Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 324–26.

Divine Negotiation (2:6b-2:20)

In Habakkuk 1:13-17, the prophet seeks to advance his cause by admitting that the LORD has given mankind dominion over the earth through governmental structures and asserting that the Chaldeans are unworthy to wield such power due to their idolatry, violence, and comparably greater wickedness than that of their captives. The LORD goes on to show the temporary nature of the Chaldeans' rule and their impending defeat which will lead to the captives taunting woe song.[69] Through promising eventual justice of the yet-coming captors to the prophet, the LORD defends His initial position justifying his failure to align with Habakkuk's complaint and vindicates His long-term concept of justice, which is misunderstood by Habakkuk in turns 1 and 2. This concept of divine justice begins with judgement within the house of God, and only later turns to those outside of God's covenant (Deut 30:1-8; 1 Pet 4:17).

Turn 3 (3:1-19)

The LORD's command to write demands action by Habakkuk.[70] The LORD's turn again ends without any attempt to further the conversation, leaving Habakkuk to self-initiate his turn if the conversation will continue. Habakkuk's final turn concludes with a forfeiture of his original complaint, realigning himself with God's position that his initial complaint was unjustified.

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[69] Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 110.

[70] Siahaan, "An Analysis of Adjacency Pairs," 112, viewed as a form of "Offer-Acceptance."

Prophetic Closure

Habakkuk begins his third turn with a clear indication of writing to a general audience which is fitting for a properly commissioned prophet. Habakkuk's writing commences in 3:1 with a musical note, demonstrating his knowledge of psalmody.[71] Though much was made of Habakkuk's failure to write a proper lament at the beginning of the book, Habakkuk's pristine example of a psalm of confidence in chapter 3 warrants these criticisms. With Habakkuk's psalm of confidence, the prophet has now completed his broken lament by realigning himself with God's justice, as he petitions the LORD to be merciful in His administration of wrath (3:2). Habakkuk concludes by comforting himself, noting that "I wait for the day of distress to come upon the people by whom we are raided" (3:16) and asserting that he will rejoice in the LORD despite his circumstances.

Turn Design Organization

Turn design organization seeks to describe how turns are packaged or formulated to show their preferred sequence for the interaction.[72] The two examples that ten have notes are recipient design, by which the speaker formulates an utterance in a way which invites participation from the hearer, and preference organization which shows a turn taking a preferred or dis-preferred action.[73] Throughout Habakkuk's oracle, the prophet structures his turns to invite God to respond through a variety of ways, such as using the vocative in turn 1, or blatantly challenging God's justice in relationship to His divine attributes in turn 2, inviting a reply from God in both turns. The LORD's turns however continue to exhibit a penchant for the dis-preferred, failing to agree

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[71] Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 212.

[72] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 136–37.

[73] ten have, *Doing Conversational Analysis*, 136–37.

with Habakkuk's assessments or award Habakkuk's complaints legitimacy. Though the LORD does tailor each message towards Habakkuk in some way ("you would not believe if told" [1:5], or a prophetic commission to write [2:2]), His disinclination towards Habakkuk's cause and failure to show any desire to continue the conversation warrants God's turn-design as being understood as showing a preference for the dis-preferred course of action.[74]

Conclusion

Discourse analysis and exegetical meta-structures for Habakkuk are varied and difficult.[75] Titles and colophons are typically viewed as major structural division markers, which would yield a two-part structure for Habakkuk with the first major section spanning 1:1-2:20 and the second including 3:1-19. Medio-structure, or second level, divisions would then be placed at changes of speaker and formulaic statements, so that the first major block might be divided into five or nine separate sections corresponding to 1) Habakkuk's first turn, 2) יהוה's first turn, 3) Habakkuk's second turn, 4) יהוה's opening dialogue of the second turn, and either 5) the taunt song, or each woe oracle of the taunt song receiving its own secondary division, while the idea of a third might be dismissed as in Sweeney.[76] Conversational analysis provides for an easily ascertained and defensible macrostructure for the book Habakkuk. A conversation typically includes turns, a complete turn forms a macro-segmentation unit. Each participant's turn within the macro-segmentation unit forms a medio-structural segmentation unit. Units beyond the

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[74] See Robertson, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 212, who remarks of the book, "As often happens when finite human beings venture to dialogue with infinite God, the solution to Habakkuk's problem does not come in the manner in which he might have expected. Instead of God's announcing a controlled and modest chastening of the disobedient in Israel, Habakkuk had heard with alarm the word of utter devastation."

[75] For a synopsis of common structures see Melendez, *Covenant Evocations in Habakkuk*, 80–90.

[76] Marvin A. Sweeney, "Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk," *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 1 (1991): 81–83, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853391X00171.

second level would be more diverse. This study has shown that conversational analysis, where applicable, is useful for determining macro-structures of prophetic literature.

Though the original research question which occasioned this paper was the usefulness of conversational analysis for determining macro-structure of prophecy, that question did not exhaust the extent of conversational analysis's exegetical benefit. Perhaps the most intriguing thing which a conversational analysis showed throughout the study was the development of faith within the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk begins his book with a faithless prayer (a lament lacking the expected turn to faith). Habakkuk's faithlessness is clearly considered impolite by the LORD so the LORD responds impolitely without greeting and with the ironic assertion that Habakkuk would not believe what the LORD was doing if Habakkuk were told. The LORD predicts Habakkuk's failure to believe, and Habakkuk immediately attempts to negotiate for the well-being of Judah. It is only after the faithlessness of Habakkuk is addressed/exhibited three times (1:2-4, 1:5, 1:12) that the LORD declares that the just shall live by faith. This verse's presence amid a negotiation shows an ironic rebuke of Habakkuk by the LORD, which is made crystal clear: if Habakkuk wants to live, don't stop believing. Habakkuk receives the warning and ends his book with a beautiful psalm of confidence, correcting his faithless prayer which began the conversation.

Structure of Habakkuk

1. **1:1-1:11 Turn 1**
   a. 1:1 Title/Setting
   b. 1:2-4 Complaint Initiation: *A Prophet's Faithless Frustration*
   c. 1:5-11 Divine Negotiation: *YHWH's Frustration with the Faithless*
2. **1:12-2:20 Turn 2**
   a. 1:12-2:2 Prophetic Negotiation: *A Prophet's Fragile Faith*
   b. 2:2-20 Divine Negotiation: *YHWH's Faithful Resolve*
      i. 2:2-5 Divine Repair and Concession: *YHWH is Faithful to the Faithful*
      ii. 2:6-20 Taunt Song: *YHWH is Faithful in His Justice*
         1. Woe Oracle 1
         2. Woe Oracle 2
         3. Woe Oracle 3
         4. Woe Oracle 4
         5. Woe Oracle 5
3. **3:1-19 Turn 3**
   a. 3:1 Superscript/Setting
   b. 3:2-19a Prophetic Realignment: *A Prophet's Faith-Filled Resolve*
      i. Petition 3:2
      ii. Expression of Confidence 3:3-16
      iii. Praise 3:17-19a
   c. 3:19b Post-Script/Setting

Figure 3

Habakkuk's Structure via Conversational Analysis 1

Turn: Macro-Structure Divisions	Title 1:1	Turn 1 1:2-11		Turn 2 1:12-2:20		Sub-Title 3:1	Turn 3 3:2-18	Colo-phon 3:19
Speaker: Medio Structure Divisions	Author/Redact.	Habakkuk 1:2-4	God 1:5-11	Habakkuk 1:12-2:1	God 2:2-20	Author/Redact	Habakkuk	Author/Redact.
Convo Role	Setting	Complaint Initiation	Divine Negotiation	Prophetic Negotiation	Divine Negotiation	Setting	Prophetic Realignment	Termi-nation

Micro Structure Roles:

Turn 1: COMPLAINT 1 / COMPLAINT 2 / ASSESSMENTS

Turn 2: COMMISSION | Taunt Song — vv 6-20 | WOE 1 | WOE 2 | WOE 3 | WOE 4 | WOE 5

Turn 3: Hymn of Confidence 3:2-19 | PETITION | Expression Of Confidence | PRAISE | COLOPH

Micro Structure Divisions (vv):

Turn 1: 2 / 3 / 4

Turn 2: COMMISSION 2-5 | WOE1 6-8 | WOE2 9-11 | WOE3 12-14 | WOE4 15-18 | WOE5 19-20

Turn 3: PETITION 2 | Expression Of Confidence 3-16 | PRAISE 17-19a | COLOPH 19b

Lower table (left group):

REQUEST	ASSESSMENT	WARNING	THREAT	WARNING	WARNING	THREAT	ASSESSMENT	ASSESSMENT	ASSESSMENT	ANSWER
5a	5b	6a	6b	7	8	9	9	10a	10b	11

Lower table (right group):

STRONGEST	STRONGEST	WRONGNESS	WRONGNESS	STRONGEST	STRONGEST	STRONGEST	WRONGNESS	WRONGNESS	WRONGNESS	ASSERTION	INVITATION
12a	12b	13a	13b	14	15a	15b	16a	16b	17	2:1a	2:1b

Using Pomerantz's 3 Forms of Extreme Case Formulation

Figure 4

Habakkuk's Structure via Conversational Analysis 1A (Hab 2:2-20 Micro to Molecular Divisions)

	Molecular Divisions →																											
Micro Struc-ture Roles	Commission								Taunt Song																			
Divi-sions	2:2-5								vv 6-20																			
Mini Roles	COMMISSION				REPAIR				WOE 1						WOE 2			WOE 3			WOE 4					WOE 5		
Mini Divi-sions	2-3				4-5				6-8						9-11			12-14			15-18					19-20		
Molec-ular Roles	REQUEST	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	REQUEST	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	INTERROGATIVE	WARNING	INTERJECTION	RHET INTEROG	WARNING	ASSERTION	WARNING	COMPLAINT	ASSERTION	WARNING	INTEROGATIVE	ASSERTION	COMPLAINT	REQUEST	WARNING	WARNING	RHET INTEROG	WARNING	RHET INTEROG	ASSERTION
Molec-ular Divi-sions	2a-b	2c	3a	3b	4	5a	5b	5c	6a	6b	6c	7	8a	8b	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16a	16b	17	18	19a	19b	20

Figure 5

Habakkuk's Structure via Conversational Analysis 1B (Hab 3:1-19 Micro to Molecular Divisions)																												
Micro Struc-ture Roles	TITLE	Hymn of Confidence																										DIREC
Divi-sions	3:1	3:2-19a																										19b
Mini Roles	DESCRIPTION	PETITION	EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE																						PRAISE	COLOPH
Mini Divi-sions	3:1	3:2	3-16																						17-19a	19b
Molec-ular Roles	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	REQUEST	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	INTEROGATIVE	INTEROGATIVE	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	ASSERTION	REQUEST
Molec-ular Divi-sions	1	2A	2B	3a	3b	4	5	6a	6b	7	8a	8b	9a	9b	10a	10b	11	12	13a	13b	14	15	16a	16b	16c	17-18	19a	19b

Figure 6

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